

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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MEXICAN-AMERICAN WILDLIFE AGREEMENT SIGNED

The Mexican grizzly bear has little sensitivity to political borders but a recently concluded Mexican-American wildlife agreement will afford this animal and a host of others an improved position in the wild because of stepped-up efforts in their behalf by both countries. It is the most comprehensive agreement on wildlife that the United States has signed with any country.

The agreement is a result of the first meeting of the United States-Mexico Joint Committee on Wildlife Conservation held in Mexico City last summer between Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Mexico's wildlife agency, Fauna Silvestre. A number of cooperative programs and study teams will be set up later this year on five areas of mutual concern to both countries: endangered species, migratory birds, law enforcement, wildlife management training, and unique ecosystems.

The Fish and Wildlife Service will be the lead United States agency in the agreement. However, other Federal and State agencies, as well as private conservation groups and members of the academic community, will be involved in various projects.

Endangered Species

Joint investigative teams will be formed to determine the present status of the Mexican grizzly bear, Mexican wolf, and jaguar, and to develop appropriate conservation measures. Each of these species has been extirpated over much of its former range.

The two countries will also exchange information on the status of bighorn sheep, Sonoran pronghorns, and California condors on both sides of the border. Evidence indicates that the condor still exists in the mountains of Baja California, but confirmation is needed.

Another team will be set up to recommend measures to protect existing habitats of masked bobwhite quail in Mexico and reestablish viable populations of the bird in Arizona. In addition to these teams, other species in need of study include the Mexican duck, Yuma clapper rail, peregrine falcon, and brown pelican.

Migratory Birds

Nearly 80 families of birds migrate across the Mexican-U.S. border. Species of special management interest are ducks, geese, cranes, and doves.

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Each winter United States and Mexican biologists make a survey of black brant populations in Mexico, and every fifth year all waterfowl habitat in Mexico is surveyed. The United States will work closely with Mexico in establishing better exchanges of information, coordinating surveys, and monitoring populations and harvests of black brant.

Whooping cranes from Texas and whooping cranes hatched from transplanted eggs at Grays Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Idaho may winter in Mexico along with sandhill cranes. Mexico will develop a program to inform its citizens of this possibility, and will take special measures to protect the cranes.

White-winged doves, found in Mexico and the United States, are threatened by habitat loss in both countries through brushland clearing for farming and extensive damage being caused on grain crops. A committee on white-winged doves may be formed in the International Association of Game, Fish, and Conservation Commissioners to develop and implement a coordinated Federal-State plan. Mexico will be invited to participate if such a group is formed.

Law Enforcement

Cooperation will be expanded in the enforcement of existing wildlife laws in both countries, especially where they are being broken by citizens of the opposite country. Each country will identify needs for revised or new wildlife protection laws and will jointly investigate alleged illegal international traffic in poisons used for the control of predators. Law enforcement will also be a major effort for training under the agreement.

Wildlife Management Training

The two countries agreed to establish a comprehensive training program, primarily for Mexican nationals. Dr. George Hulsey of the National Wildlife Federation has been selected as project leader. Proposals include establishing a two-year training school for wildlife technicians, an exchange of professors in wildlife disciplines and "on-the-job" training and scholarship programs for Mexican nationals.

Rare Ecosystems

The Government of Mexico considers the management and protection of the natural resources of Baja California a top priority in the agreement. Baja is probably the most distinctive biotic province in North America but is threatened by future development, a result of strong pressures by U.S. citizens. Studies will be done on the impact of the new 1,100-mile long highway spanning the length of the province; the development of tourism and recreation facilities along the coasts, on the islands, and in the Gulf; and the exploration and exploitation of natural resources in the area. Potential energy development and the introduction of exotic species will also be studied. In general, the major concerns include the protection of natural areas, habitats of endangered species and migratory birds, fragile mountain, desert, and seashore areas, and sites of archaeological and historical significance.